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ABSTRACT

A model is proposed and tested which suggests that students who come tc schccl with more pcsitive attitudes toward the political system generalize these attitudes to the schccl as a substitute political system. In turn, they seek cut involvement in extracurricular and governance activities in the high schccl. Tc test this model, two attitude questicnaires were given tc about 200 students in urban, suburban, and rural high schccls. Four basic attitudes were measured: social trust, social integraticn, political interest, and pclitical confidence. Findings indicate that sociopolitical attitudes toward sccicty dc generalize tc the school as a political system. Students with Positive schccl sccicpclitical attitudes are inclined tc involve themselves in schccl activities which contribute to the development of pclitical ccmpeterce. School political attitudes cf interest and ccnfidence are particularly strong predictors of this involvement. Grade level has a modest impact cn involvement, while gender appears tc have negligible impact. It is suggested that further research is needed cn the school as a surrogate political system, on the percepticns kcys and girls have about the relevance cf schccl activities tc future pclitical roles, and cn the political characteristics cf schccls.
(Author/JK)

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A MODEL RELATING POLITICAL ATTITUDES TO PARTICIPATION IN HIGH SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

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A MODEL RELATING POLITICAL ATTITUDES TO PARTICIPATION IN HIGH SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

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> " you all of a sudden catch on that life is nothing but high school . . . You get out into real life and it turns out to be high school all over again -- class officers, cheerleaders and all." (Vonnegut,1975)

High school as Vonnegut perceives is in some ways a surrogate for the broader society. This parallel has long served as a rationale for extra-curricular programs. (Ziblatt, 1965) It was assumed that students involved in such activities would develop positive attitudes about the political system and their role in it. These attitudes were important because they were associated with adult political behavior. Some authors suggested that these early positive attitudes created basic support for maintenance of the political system that withstood the later development of political cynicism. (Easton & Dennis, 1967) Others found evidence to associate such political attitudes as interest and efficacy with active expressions of political competence. (Lane, 1959; Milbrath, 1965)

Results of political socialization research have not lent much support to the view that the high school experience contributes to the development of political attitudes. Studies have shown that students' political attitudes approach adult levels by the 8th grade, (Hess & Torney,1967) and that high school instruction has little impact on such attitudes. (Langton & Jennings, 1968) Even participation experiences specifically designed to involve older students in political action have had limited

impact on such basic attitudes as political efficacy. (Jones, 1974)

There is thus a gap in our understanding of the political socialization process. Attitudes established prior to high school appear important to adult political competence; what happens to these attitudes during the high school years is unclear. This study attempts to bridge this gap in our understanding of the contributions of the high school to development of political competence. Political attitudes are not viewed as outcomes of the high school experience, or as a single index of political socialization, but as predictors of some aspects of high school experience; development of political attitudes is seen as a first step in the process of attaining political competence. It is the thesis of this study that the high school provides a political arena for the expression of these attitudes in activities expected to further enhance the individuals political development.

As M. Brewster Smith has observed about personal competence, political competence consists of a basic core of attitudes like trust, social integration, confidence and interest and a behavioral component of "habits, skills and abilities, that are required to translate hopeful expectations and active orientations into effective behavior." (Smith, 1969) We expect these two aspects of political competence to be bound together:

> "Launched on the right trajectory, the person is likely to accumulate successes that strengthen the effectiveness of his orientation toward the world, while at the same time he acquires the knowledge and the skills that make his further success probable. His environmental involvements generally led to gratification and to increased competence . . . Off to a bad start, he soon encounters failures that make him hesitant to try again . . . and he falls increasingly behind his fellows in acquiring the knowledge and skills that are needed for success on those occasions when he does try."(Smith, 1969)

We would expect those students who had already attained high levels of trust, political interest and confidence to involve themselves in school political settings. Students active in extra-curricular activities, especially those involving school governance, should develop the participation and leadership skills that will add to their political effectiveness and may develop habits of participation that will transfer to later involvement in the political community. (Bennet, 1956; Marks, 1958) The reverse would tend to be true for those who had not achieved this first level of competence, positive attitudes towards the political system. For Vonneguts analogy can be extended - - as in real life, there are not only class officers and cheerleaders, but the apathetic, the uninvolved and the disaffected as well. The high school, like society, provides a political arena; those who will benefit are those who choose to enter. Many do not choose to enter; as many as half of the students in some schools in this study did not participate in school activities.

A MODEL RELATING SOCIO-POLITICAL ATTITUDES TO GROUP PARTICIPATION

In this analysis, a model is proposed and tested which suggests that students who come to school with more positive attitudes towards the political system, generalize these attitudes to the school as a surrogate political system and in turn seek out involvement in extra-curricular and governance activities in the arena of the high school.

If this notion that the high school is a political arena is valid we would predict that student attitudes and participation would be related in the following ways:

First, we would expect students to perceive the school as a political system; we would expect them to transfer their general

attitudes of social trust and integration, and political interest and confidence, to the school, expressing them in high levels of school trust and integration, and school political interest and confidence. Dawson and Prewitt discuss this tendency to transfer general social attitudes to specific parallel objects like the school. (Dawson & Prewitt, 1969) In the only study exploring this link, Meixel and Haller found a relationship between sense of school efficacy and general political efficacy in Canadian elementary school children. (Meixel & Haller, 1973) They suggest that the children were generalizing from their school experience to the political system, but found no relationship between their independent measure of classroom climate and the childrens' sense of school efficacy. It is as plausible to suggest that the childrens' general sense of personal or political efficacy was transferred to the school room.

We would, in turn, expect students with positive attitudes towards the school as a political system to seek out situations in which to express these predispositions in action. School political interest and confidence should be especially powerful predictors of involvement in school groups if these activities are serving political as well as social functions.

The grade level of the student should also be a factor in group involvement; students who have been in school longer have had more opportunity to become active. The spring data collection point - which meant that sophomore had had a year to become involved in the school and seniors were beginning to look beyond graduation - may mitigate the effect of grade level on attitudes and participation.

Finally, we expect these relationships to be modified by the sex of the student. There is a good deal of evidence in the political socialization literature to suggest that males are more active and show more political interest than females. (Hyman,1959) While recent studies have found fewer gender differences in political attitudes, there is some evidence that these attitudes and participation in school activities hold a different meaning for boys than girls. For example, Merelman found few attitude differences, but found that senior high school boys were six times as likely to show an interest in future active political participation than were girls. (Merelman,1971) Rehberg and Shafer found that boys tended to view participation in school activities as connected with their future occupational and educational roles; girls did not anticipate this future relevance for their high school participation. (Rehberg & Shafer, 1973) If this is true for political attitudes as well, we would expect school political attitudes to be stronger predictors of participation in governance activities for boys than for girls. Participation should be a more immediate expression of school social interest for girls than for boys. Since gender is expected to modify the relationship among the variables, the model will be tested separately for males and females. The following diagram illustrates the pattern of relationships among variables predicted in our model:

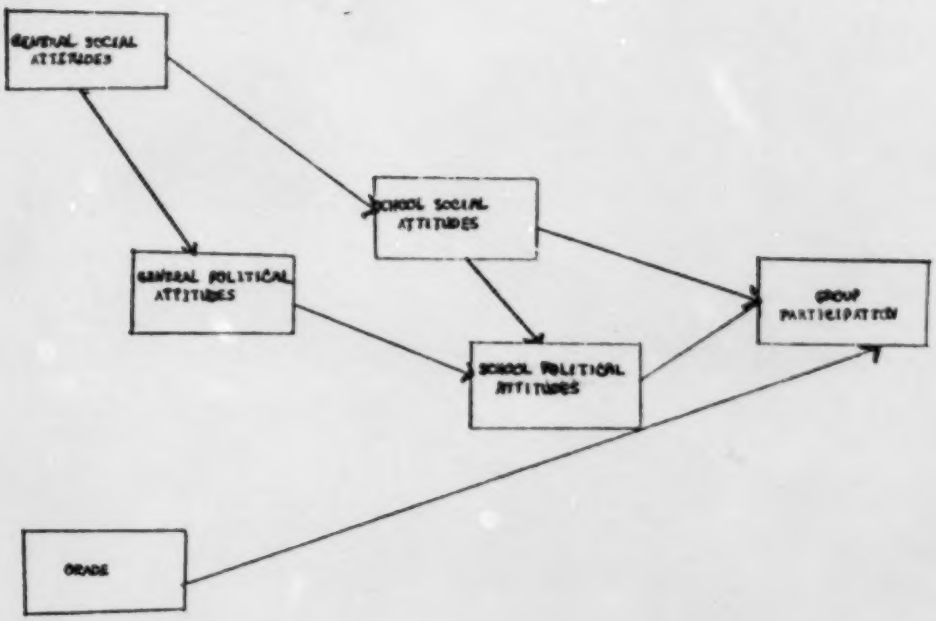


Figure 1: Model Relating Socio-political Attitudes and Grade Level to Participation in High School Extra-curricular Activities

PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY

Data for this analysis were gathered in the spring of 1974 by the School Political Behavior Research Project, with which the author was associated. (Ehman & Gillespie,1975)

SCHOOL SAMPLE

An attempt was made to choose public schools that varied in size,

location, racial and social make-up. No attempt was made at random sampling. The 13 schools chosen represent the following size categories and location types:

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE SCHOOLS BY SIZE AND LOCATION

Location	School Size		
	under 1000	1000 -2000	over 2000
Urban	0	3	2
Small city suburban	1	2	3
Rural	2	0	0

STUDENT SAMPLE

Within each of the 13 schools about 200 students were chosen to respond to two questionaires. To minimize school disruption, in most cases students were sampled by classes. Required classes, meeting at different time of the day were chosen in order to minimize systematic bias. The main sample includes 2,546.

An additional student sample was obtained by having students in the main sample list groups "most actively involved in planning and making important decisions in your school". An attempt was made to administer the attitude questionaire to all members of the top three groups nominated in each school . We have data from 32 such groups.

We have combined these two samples for this analysis which brings the total student sample to 3087. Students appearing in both sub-samples are counted once.

THE VARIABLES

The Socio-Political Attitudes

Four basic attitudes, which commonly appear as dependent variables in political socialization research, were included in this research; social trust, social integration, political interest and political confidence. Each attitude was measured with regard to two referents -- the society in general and the students' own school. Students responded on five point Likert type scales which ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Trust

Trust is the relatively enduring belief that human behavior is consistent and governed by non-negative motives. A Sample item: (Ehman & Gillespie, 1975)

> "What people tell me and what they actually do are two completely different things"

Social Integration

Social integration refers to the relatively enduring belief that one is connected to one's social environment and not cut off or alienated from it. A sample item:

> "What happens with other people in my school has an influence on what I will do."

Political Interest

Political Interest is defined as the relatively enduring set of beliefs which predisposes one to respond positively toward political situations.

" I would like to figure out how decisions are made in our school."

Political Confidence

Political Confidence refers to the relatively enduring belief that one's actions can have an effect in political activities. It is analogous to

to political efficacy. A sample item:

"People like me can influence political decisions."

The 80 items which composed the initial eight scales were selected from a larger pool of items administered in two schools used for pre-test purposes. The ten items showing the highest factor loading on each dimension were chosen for the attitude instrument used in the study. In order to determine if these 80 items did function as the scales for which they were constructed, factor analysis was again performed using the responses from the 2,546 students in our main sample.

The 40 general attitude items do appear to form four distinct socio-political attitudes corresponding with the items chosen to represent trust, integration, political interest and political confidence. The 40 school related items yielded five scales. The integration, political interest and political confidence items loaded as expected; the trust scale was divided into two five item scales corresponding with trust in other students and trust in school adults. Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure reliability of the nine scales. Results are shown below:

TABLE 2 . RELIABILITIES OF THE NINE ATTITUDE SCALES

ATTITUDES	RELIABILITY
GENERAL SOCIO-POLITICAL ATTITUDES	
Trust	.68
Social Integration	.60
Political Interest	.86
Political Confidence	.82
SCHOOL SOCIO-POLITICAL ATTITUDES	
Trust in Other Students	.76
Trust in School Adults	.81
School Social Integration	.83
School Political Interest	.84
School Political Confidence	.82

To simplify presentation of data in this paper, and since the predicted relationships involving the social attitudes of trust and integration and the political attitudes of interest and confidence are the same, we have blocked these attitudes in the analysis. Social attitudes of trust and integration are grouped to form General Social Attitudes and School Social Attitudes; political attitudes of interest and confidence combine to form General Political Attitudes and School Political Attitudes. As each individual develops attitudes towards society and then towards the school, we would expect a growth of social trust and integration to precede the more active and specialized attitudes of political interest and confidence; we have ordered them accordingly in the analysis.

Group Participation

The underlying dimension of the group participation variable is the degree to which the group should afford opportunity for acquiring and practicing political skills. There are three categories of group involvement: 1. the student is a participant in school governance activities, 2. the student is involved in other school groups, 3. the student is not involved in school groups. Governance activities include student councils, student executive advisory groups, class councils and so forth. Other activities include such groups as language clubs, honor society, and student athletics.

Since the students in our total sample come from two sub-samples, different methods were used for assigning them to the categories. In the main sample students were assigned to category 2 or 3 on the basis of their response to a questions asking them to categorize the nature of their

group participation. Those indicating that they did not belong to school groups were assigned to category 3; all other responses were assigned to category 2.

Students in the special sub-sample were assigned to their group on the basis of the characteristics of their group. Members of governance activities were assigned to category 1; all other group members were placed in category 2. If students appear in more than one category they are assigned to the highest category in which they appear, for example, members of governance groups who also fall in the main sample are assigned to category 1.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

In our earlier discussion, we suggest a causal ordering of variables; general attitudes are formed then transferred to the school, inclining students to become involved in activities available in the school. Since this is cross sectional data, such causal interpretation cannot be clearly established. Refering to "associations" of variables, avoiding causal terms, does not erase the implicit causal assumptions made when these associations are interpreted.

Path analysis is a useful technique for testing the plausibility of such an assumed ordering of variables in cross sectional research. It allows us to break original zero order correlations into direct effects i.e. the proportion of standard deviation by which a dependent variable changes when a given antecedent variable changes a full standard deviation - other variables held constant, and indirect effects i.e. the part of the total effect of a particular variable on the dependent variable which is accounted for by influences of other intervening variables.

Results of the path analysis will tell us whether the interpretation suggested can be supported by the data; there are of course, other models of the data which might yield plausible results.

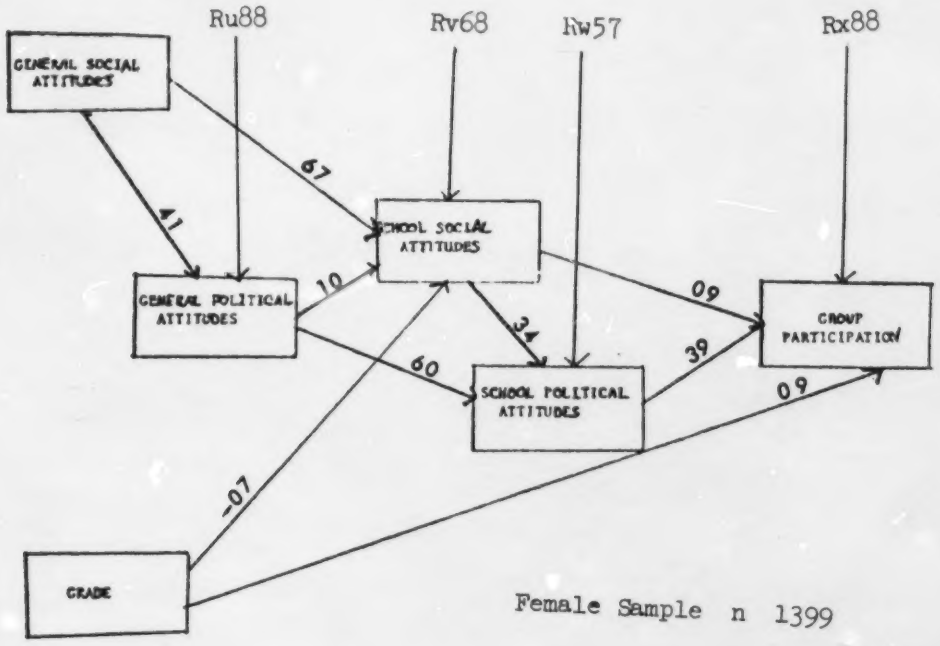
The multiple regression option of the SPSS computer package is used. (Nie, et al, 1975) The model is tested with all variables entered in to the regression equation, i.e. fully identified. Each direct path yielding a Beta of less than .05 is deleted from the model as non-existent and the regression including it as a predictor is rerun. (Kerlinger,1970) Basic path models are assumed to be linear, recursive and additive. Therefore sex, which is thought to modify the relationship among variables is not included as a variable in the model; separate path analysis is performed for males and females.

Since the N is large, significant differences may be obtained when actual differences in attitude scores are very slight and have little practical import. In order to illustrate how these relationships translate into student responses, means on each composite attitude for each participation category will be presented.

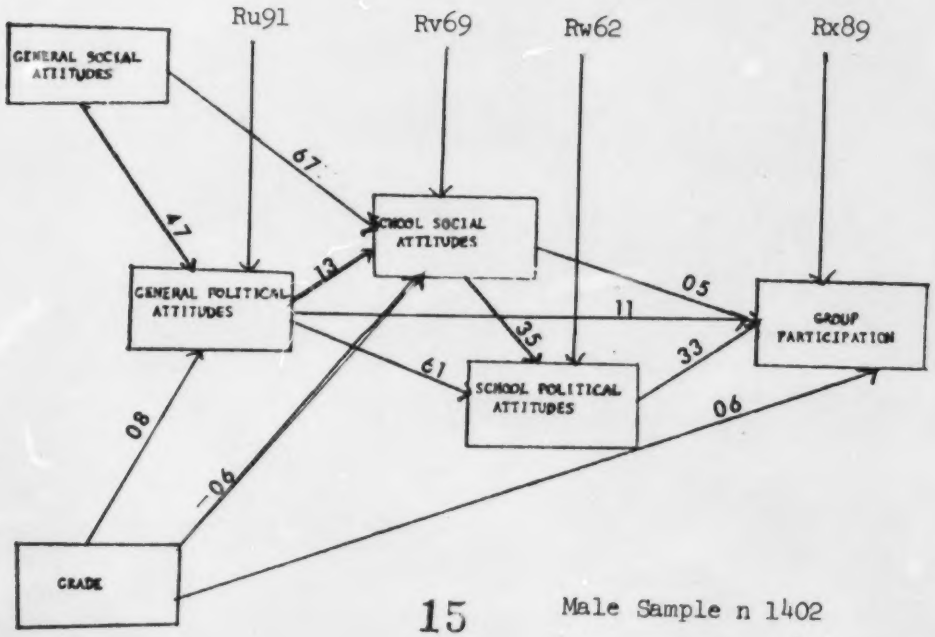
RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The empirically derived path models are presented on the following page. As can be seen from the path daigrams, the data of this study fit the proposed models very well. The notion advanced earlier that the school is a surrogate for society is supported by the magnitude of direct paths from the general to school attitudes; general socio-political attitudes do appear to be transferred to the school. The model accounts for from one half to two thirds of the variance in school attitudes.

FIGURE 2. EMPIRICALLY DERIVED PATH MODELS RELATING SOCIO-POLITICAL ATTITUDES TO PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES IN THE HIGH SCHOOL POLITICAL ARENA



Female Sample n 1399



Male Sample n 1402

This is a substantial relationship especially since we would expect school attitudes to be affected by policies, personnel and other idiosyncracies of the particular school as well as by the students' general socio-political attitudes.

Another important result of the path analysis is the deletion of direct paths between general attitudes and group participation. As expected the correlations between these variables can be explained by their relationship with school socio-political attitudes. One expects general political attitudes to affect involvement in school activities only if these attitudes are applied to the school as a political system as well. The one deviation from this pattern, a link between General Political Attitudes and Group Participation for males will be considered when sex differences are discussed.

The best predictor of Group Participation in the school is School Political Attitudes. There are many reasons for becoming involved in school activities; students join groups to be with friends, for prestige, to build a record for admission to an elite college and soforth. The fact that the political attitude variable is a much more powerful predictor of group participation than the school social attitudes of trust and integration, lends support to the view that involvement in school governance activity does have political significance for students -- the school is a political arena.

Grade, as predicted, contributes to group participation; one expects students in school longer to have more opportunity for group involvement. The negative path linking Grade and School Social Attitudes might be accounted for by the spring data gathering time; seniors are anticipating their post graduate roles and may feel less connected to the high school.

These particular data do not yield dramatic sex differences; the similarities between the models is more remarkable. The distributions of socio-political attitudes are similar for boys and girls; girls are slightly more positive for most of the attitudes tested. School activity patterns also fail to show that boys are more active in the political arena of the high school. In fact, in the 13 schools in this study, girls were significantly more likely than boys to participate in school activities in general, in school governance groups, and to be identified by peers as taking leadership roles within governance groups. (Eyler, 1977) Girls are as, or more likely, to have school experiences that should contribute to their political competence and to have same sex leadership models in school groups.

There is some evidence for the prediction that school activity may have different significance for boys than for girls. The differences which do occur between the models are not precisely as predicted, but they are consistent with the underlying rationale for these predictions. School attitudes, both social and political, are better predictors of group participation for girls than for boys. We had predicted that social attitudes would be stronger for girls and that political attitudes would be better predictors for boys. There is, however, a direct path linking General Political Attitudes to Group Participation for boys; this is the only link between general political attitudes and group participation in either of the models. This suggests that political attitudes are better predictors of involvement in school governance activity for boys than girls. As noted, other research has established that boys tend to predict a future political role for themselvesmore than girls do, and that boys tend to associate

their participation in school activities with future occupational roles. The results reported here, while not containing direct evidence of student perceptions of the relationship of participation to future political roles, is consistent with the view that boys make a greater connection between political attitudes and participation in governance activity. Group participation may be a more political activity for boys than for girls.

The following table presents means on each of the composite attitudes for each participation category by sex to illustrate actual differences in student response:

TABLE 3. ATTITUDE MEANS BY GROUP PARTICIPATION BY SEX

Attitudes	Sex	Non-Participation	Participation Non-Governance	Participation Governance
General Social Attitudes	F	3.17	3.45	3.50
	M	3.13	3.33	3.48
General Political Attitudes	F	2.67	3.10	3.32
	M	2.76	3.15	3.68
School Social Attitudes	F	3.38	3.73	3.87
	M	3.32	3.60	3.89
School Political Attitudes	F	3.14	3.63	3.86
	M	3.04	3.42	3.95

While most differences are substantial considering the five point response scale, particularly noteworthy are differences in both general and school political attitudes compared with differences in social attitudes among the participant categories. The fact that political attitudes differentiate participant categories more clearly than do social

attitudes lends support to the view that choosing to become involved in student governance activity is an act with political relevance to students.

In summary, the empirically derived path models approximate the predicted model and allow us to conclude that socio-political attitudes towards society do generalize to the school as a political system. Students with positive school socio-political attitudes are, in turn, inclined to involve themselves in school activities which contribute to the development of political competence. School political attitudes of interest and confidence are particularly strong predictors of this involvement. Grade level has a modest impact on the quality of involvement, while gender appear to have negligible impact.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND FURTHER RESEARCH

A new model relating political attitudes to school participation has been supported by our data. If the model is valid, it has a number of important implications for political socialization research and theory development. By using political attitudes to predict participation behavior rather than as outcomes of school experience, this model suggests a way to bridge a major gap in political socialization theory. Political attitudes are well established before high school; these same attitudes are associated with adult political behavior. The place of the high school in furthering political competence has been in doubt. By establishing the high school as a political arena where these attitudes are expressed in participation behaviors, this model suggests that the primary contribution of the high school to the development of political

competence may lie in the effects of this participation. Specifically participation within the school political arena in varied group settings, in leadership and participant roles, and in school decision making processes is expected to contribute to the development of politically useful skills.

A second effect of this participation may be to contribute to the maintenance of the positive political attitudes developed prior to high school. The fact that political attitudes associated with adult political behavior generally are well established by the eighth grade does not guarantee that they will remain stable throughout adolescence and adulthood. Recent research has traced a steady decline in such attitudes as trust in government institutions and political self-confidence in the American electorate over the past decade. (Miller, 1974) This has been speculatively attributed to such political events as assassinations, the Viet Nam war and governmental corruption, and to the impact of the focus of the mass media on negative events. (Robinson,1976) If the development of political competence is a cyclic process as has been suggested here, then one would expect experiences which build political skills to sustain the students' initial political confidence and interest, perhaps offsetting some of the forces acting to undercut these positive political attitudes assumed to be important for maintenance of the political system.

The support for the model suggests further lines of research and theory development. The strong relationship between general political and school political attitudes lends credibility to the view that the school is a surrogate political system. This suggests that further theoretical development and empirical investigation of school experience from a political science perspective will be fruitful. Greater attention should

be devoted to describing the school as a political system.

More adequate descriptions of schools and settings within schools are necessary if the effects of the "hidden curriculum" on the development of political competence are to be identified. Also critical to ascertaining the impact of the schooling experience is adequate identification and measurement of appropriate outcome variables. Since development of participation skills, rather than political attitudes, appears to be a productive focus for research during the high school years, greater attention must be paid to identifying and measuring the decision making, leadership and participation skills that are desired outcomes of political education.

More adequate description of the political characteristics of schools and identification of appropriate socio-political skills will allow a number of questions suggested by this research to be answered. It will be possible to learn whether political skillfulness does in fact increase during the high school years, or it it, like political attitudes develops at an earlier age. It will be possible to determine what types of school experiences, if any, contribute to the development of this skill component of political competence. It will be possible to find out if political behaviors expressed in a particular school context, transfer to other settings, or are related to effective adult political behavior.

Better description and measurement of school political experience and political skills will also facilitate exploration of possible effects of participation on attitude development. Although this research is based on the assumption that attitudes lead to participation in skill enhancing activities, there are two ways in which the reverse effect

might be anticipated. As previously noted, the development of political competence is a cyclic process. With adequate measures of political skill it will be possible to determine if increased skillfulness from participation experience does have the effect of maintaining or increasing positive attitudes towards the political system. It is also possible that the negative cycle can be interrupted; participation experiences which increase skillfulness may have a remedial effect on political attitudes for those students who enter school with comparatively negative attitudes towards the political system and themselves as citizens.

In this analysis, it has also been suggested that participation in school governance activity has a different significance for boys than for girls. If there is a different significance in these activities, it is not expressed in the types of activities, or group leadership roles chosen by males and females; these choices were quite similar. Evidence is needed about the perceptions that boys and girls have about the relevance of school activities to their future political roles.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE MODEL FOR SCHOOL PRACTICE

The recognition that political attitudes are predictors of participation in the political arena of the high school, makes clear that high school is a relatively late influence in the cycle of development of political competence. The voluntary nature of school activities in the typical American comprehensive high school, coupled with the fact that student propensities to participate are formed prior to high school means that the high school will not have a monolithic influence. The richness of the political environment for any particular student is dependent

on that student's decision to become involved in available settings. For students who do not choose to involve themselves, the high shool may be irrelevant as a factor in their political development. Even students who choose to engage in school activities may elect to participate in ways that add relatively little to their political competence. In some schools there may be relatively few opportunities for participation in roles or settings that will facilitate the development of political skills. The influence of the high school political arena is thus likely to be rather haphazard.

If one wishes to increase student political competence, one cannot rely on the political arena provided by voluntary group activity. This approach assures that the competent will become more so and students already deficient in political skills will remain deficient. If political skillfulness is a desired goal then systematic attempts to achieve this goal must be made.

One way to intervene in the cycle of development is through the curriculum. Both information useful for a sophisticated understanding of political participation and training in actual participation skills can be provided through instruction. Although much secondary civics instruction continues to be bland, misleading and redundant (APSA, 1971) there is evidence in Litt's study of the impact of text materials on the socialization of adolescents, that the curriculum can make a difference. He found that students using text material which portrayed the group nature of political influence and the conflict inherent in the political process had a more adequate view of politics, than students who were exposed to materials stressing loyalty and individual citizen efficacy. (Litt,1963) Adolescence is an appropriate period for the

study of political conflict and effective strategies of political influence, as well as political skills; students are likely to have the ccgnitive capacity to master these complex concepts and the interest necessary for effective instruction. (Riccards, 1973) Efforts can also be made to teach the group process skills necessary for personal political effectiveness. The classroom offers maximum opportunities to manipulate student experiences; each student can be assured of the chance to participate in a variety of leadership and participation roles.

The natural political environment of the school can also be utilized in a more systematic way than is provided through voluntary activities. Study of the political system of the school can serve as an intitial link between classroom learning and political practice. The hidden curriculum can become part of the formal political education curriculum.

School governance can also be organized to encourage more, and more varied, participation by students. There are a number of examples of such attempts to involve students in school governance in both alternative schools and public high schools. The impact of these experiences on political competence remains to be studied.

Attempts to involve students in participation experiences within the wider political community is a natural continuation of this effort to link classroom learning with political acitivity.

The focus on designing strategies for development of political participation skills during the high school years seems appropriate in light of the early development of the attitude component of political competence, and its effect on channeling students into potentially skill building activities. Before effective programs to achieve this end

can be created a good deal more theoretical and empirical work remains to be done. As the political system of the school is more adequately described, and as mre is learned about the kinds of school experiences that contribute to political competence, systematic attempts to organize school decision making to involve all students in such experiences may be made.

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